**A contrast in Friendship**

“The way we live now" (Sontang, 1991) is a complex short story which is a clear example of how some things that are evident for some people are completely different for others. This narration is not about an illness, or the suffering of someone ill, but about friendship and the contrasting points within. The facts related by the characters are not about the fight of a person against AIDs, but how the world around him reacts when dealing with something like that. In this way, two of the main character’s friends: Lewis and Xavier, show extreme points of behavior when dealing with his friend illness. Therefore, it can be said that Lewis and Xavier are two characters that express their fears, hopes and selfishness in different and contrasting ways

Lewis, one of the main character’s friend, is shown at the very beginning as a person dominated by passions. He is the one who starts asking questions and looking for a reasonable answer for the disease his friend caught. His reaction to the lack of answer from the doctors makes him behave in this way. According to Kübler-Ross (1969), there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Lewis, as a passional character, is moved by his inner feelings when has no reasonable answer about the illness and the possible treatments. However it is important in here to focus in this first reaction. It can be said that in some way he is in the stage of anger, the one where all the feelings and questions arise. He is in angry because his friend is not having a proper response to what he is passing through.

On the other hand, it may be possible that Lewis is not only worry just for his friend, but for himself too. He needs and answer in order to help his friend in the crucial fight he is fighting, and also to have some peace of mind. “When the phone rings I’m scared to answer because I think it will be someone telling me someone else is ill” (Sontang, 1991 p. 12) This is an example of how much Lewis is afraid of being him the next one in getting ill. For that reason, he is so desperate and angry; because he needs a cure or a treatment before having the call. In this way, and through these emotions and feelings shown, it could be suggested that Lewis is a selfish character. He cares for his friend, but just because the problem may affect him too.

As an opposite point, Xavier is a character that is shown as a person with a weak spirit. He is full of doubts, especially in terms of science, because he prefers to believe in a miracle rather than believing in the efforts of doctors to find a cure for his friend. This necessity of believing in something is shown in his actions, more precisely when he brings a saint’s figure to the hospital room. “Where I come from, Sebastian is the protector against pestilence” (Sontag, 1991 p. 29) His trust and confidence are not in doctors or science, but in God’s hands. In this way, and taking into account that in this part of the story the nameless main character’s health is getting weaker and weaker, it Xavier’s action may imply that he is the only one who has a inner fight between faith and reason.

In contrast to this last point, Xavier can also be seen as the only friend, apart from Quentin who decides to live with his ill friend in order to help him, that actually does something beyond words. All the friends try to make their friend’s day easier by bringing him flowers or magazines; but Xavier brings something personal and quite related to his deeper roots and beliefs: a saint’s statue. This, of course is a sample of the extreme competition that all these persons have in order to become the most important friend for this nameless character. Nevertheless, the only one who shares something more than a personal opinion, a visit or flowers and magazines is Xavier. So, through this simple fact such as bringing a saint’s figure, it could be assume that friendship is a matter of sharing everything.

In brief, Lewis as much as Xavier are two characters that want to behave as true friends, but through their actions they express their fears, hopes and selfishness. Their contrasting behaviors may be taken as perfect example of something that can be seen constantly. As Betsy said “that seems to be the way we live now” (Sontag, 1991 p. 12)

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References

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